

The sixth Scottish Older People's Assembly (SOPA 2014)



Press release 7/11/2014

Assembly action plan

More than 200 older people including the organisations that represent them joined MSPs at the Scottish Parliament to debate vital topics affecting quality of later life.

The lively and productive debate at the sixth Scottish People's Assembly (SOPA) produced an action plan to influence and shape future policy, service planning and implementation. This was based on the issues arising at local meetings in the summer SOPA campaign around Scotland.

SOPA Local Meetings

Between June and September 2014, twelve meetings were held around Scotland with over 400 representative older people attending. These took place in Hamilton, Glasgow, Dundee, Ayr, Penicuik, Dumfries, Kirkcaldy, Stirling, Inverness and Shetland, with two meetings in Edinburgh. Participant numbers ranged from 83 in Ayr to 15 in Shetland and Dumfries. Presentations covered SOPA's activities, human rights issues and topics by local contributors.

Evaluation: Initial Conclusions

The evaluation of the local meetings was conducted by the Employment Research Institute at Edinburgh Napier University using 239 evaluation forms completed at 8 local SOPA meetings. The draft report found that the majority rated the meetings as either very or extremely useful.

Question

Following the presentations and small group discussion each participant was invited to anonymously respond in writing to the following question:

“If you had the chance to speak at the Scottish Older People's Assembly in the Scottish Parliament what one action would you request to benefit the older people in Scotland?”

Responses

374 responses were received. Most are related to health and social care (112 responses - 30%), followed by 'Community Empowerment' (68 responses - 18%), pensions, retirement and money (64 responses - 17%), community safety and housing (59 responses - 16%), transport, travel and environment (44 responses - 12%) and communication (27 responses - 7%). However, responses from each meeting produced a different set of priorities. For example, Edinburgh 2 prioritised community empowerment, while Edinburgh 1, Shetland and South Lanarkshire identified retirement, pensions and money as a priority. Dumfries identified safety and housing as its main issue of concern.

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The SOPA 2014 propositions are as follows:-

Transport Travel and Environment

1. SOPA is dismayed that many people in later life cannot benefit from concessionary travel due to disability or the non-existence of appropriate public transport. SOPA calls on the Scottish Government and all transport providers, including community transport to work together to provide a link to an integrated transport system for all.
2. Given the emphasis the World Health Organisation places on the relationship between health and social care and built environments, SOPA is concerned about the ongoing closure of public toilets. SOPA calls on COSLA to work with local authorities to ensure outdoor places support active ageing, by improving and extending access to all public and green spaces, including toilets.
3. SOPA is disappointed that, despite repeated representations, the traffic signage between hospitals in South Lanarkshire is still inadequate.

Retirement, Pensions and Money Matters

1. SOPA expresses grave concern that the Westminster Government's intention to introduce a new flat rate pension in 2016 will create a two-tier pension system. SOPA calls for urgent action to ensure that everyone in receipt of a current state pension will be guaranteed a single rate pension above the poverty threshold of £178 per week for 2016.
2. SOPA calls on the Scottish Government to recognise the contribution to society of all non – paid carers and the savings made by them to the Government. SOPA calls on the Government to financially recognise the savings all carers make whether or not they are pensioners.
3. SOPA is called upon to organise a programme of scrutiny of all local authority and undertaker charges linked to funerals.

Health and Social Care

1. SOPA calls for all care policy makers and care providers to give **respect** to the humanity and dignity of people who are cared for as well as paid and non paid carers.
2. SOPA calls on the Scottish Government and all local authorities to develop and implement a national standard for care at home to ensure that all health and social care staff are trained in the delivery of care, receive a living wage, and that all people across Scotland receive the same standard of care. In the time of budget cuts all of this should be cost effective.

Community Safety and Housing

1. SOPA calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that a variety of suitable housing , to include sheltered housing and assisted housing with 24 hour care, particularly in the rural areas is available for older and disabled people, with an appropriate amount of housing being ring fenced for use only by older people. New housing should be accessible and of an appropriate size too.
2. SOPA calls on the Government to increase the visible presence of police officers, particularly in rural communities, and to enforce traffic speed restrictions to enable older people to cross the road safely and with plenty of time.
3. SOPA believes that older people should have the autonomy to choose their own energy suppliers and factors regardless of the type of housing they live in.

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Community Empowerment

1. SOPA calls on the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament to ensure that when engaging with the community the consultation must be clear and in a form that can be understood by everyone and allowing enough time for people to have meaningful actions that can be reported back to their community within a reasonable time scale. This will enable people to educate themselves.
2. Scope and width of the opportunities provided by the Community and Empowerment (Scotland) Bill needs to be clearly communicated to all to allow all communities to empower themselves, particularly through participation requests.
3. While recognising many different kinds of communities of both geographical and of common community interests, the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill must recognise communities of age that is older people in the ethnic minority and the LGBT groups to empower them directly.

Communication and Information

1. SOPA calls for a dedicated internet access for older people and equivalent support for face to face methods of communication.
2. SOPA calls for a comprehensive scheme of intergenerational engagement to overcome stereotypes and build solidarity.
3. SOPA Committee is called upon to devise more ways to reach out to older people with special needs.

Tom Berney, Chair of SOPA said: "We now have a clear mandate from our 12 Scotland-wide grass roots meetings and from the debates at the Assembly. We will follow that mandate through working with the Scottish and Westminster Governments and COSLA to shape policy but, where necessary, we will campaign for the results we want to see. We also want to build our relationship with MSPs and MPs to ensure they have a good understanding of the voice and experience of older people at their constituency level.

"The austerity backdrop for all public bodies is a difficult and stressful situation for all concerned so we all must work together to find the solutions, hence the need for older people to be involved in helping to create and monitor the policies that affect them and in reporting cases where they fail."

Speaking specifically about the issue of pensions, Tom said that the people of Scotland currently had a shorter life expectancy - with someone in Shettleston living on average 14 years less than someone in Chelsea.

"This is an example of where policies should be tailored to the needs of the people they benefit," he added. "The people of Scotland get the right to enjoy their pension for a much shorter length of time so the retirement age should relate to the life expectancy of the people that are going to get the money."

He also pointed out the contribution older people make to society – estimated at around £40 billion a year from a combination of voluntary work, caring and spending power.

"On top of that," he added. "Many of the action points we have come up with will actually save money!"

Cabinet Secretary for Pensioners' Rights, Shona Robison spoke at the Assembly on Friday.

She said: "Recognising and celebrating the contribution that older people make to our society is vitally important. In seeking to harness this and empower older people, we must do all we can to ensure their rights are fully protected, respected and realised. As a Government, we are committed to advancing the equality of all our people so that everyone has the opportunity to make the most of their talents.

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"The Scottish Older People's Assembly is your voice in the Government and we will be engaging in an on-going dialogue with you going forward to ensure that everything you hold dear – the NHS, free personal care, your pensions, concessionary bus travel and the winter fuel allowance - continues to be part of the social fabric of a modern, inclusive Scotland and the social contract we enjoy with the people of Scotland."

Feedback to and further engagement *with* older people throughout Scotland will be funded by a recently announced £10,000 award from the Big Lottery Fund.

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Editors notes:-

- 12 meetings were held between June and September – two in Edinburgh and one in South Lanarkshire, Glasgow, Dundee, Penicuik, Ayr, Dumfries, Kirkcaldy, Stirling, Inverness and Lerwick in Shetland.
- More than 400 representative older people attended and responded to the question. , *'If you had the chance to speak at the Scottish Older People's Assembly in the Scottish Parliament, what one action would you request to benefit older people in Scotland?'*
- Participants were involved from existing forums for older people, local authorities, voluntary organisation and local media and community radio.
- Evaluation of the local meetings was conducted by Edinburgh Napier University Employment Research Unit with the majority of respondent rating the meetings as either 'very or extremely useful'
- SOPA is funded by the Scottish Parliament and the City of Edinburgh Council with a recent £10k award from the Big Lottery fund.

